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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard
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"Saying it like it is!"

It's been a long week, but a good one. It was one of those typical New England weeks. Our Father's Day celebration went well; we went to Maine to visit my father and take him out for a nice lunch. On the following day, we visited my wife's father's grave for the first time. I was tired from all of the driving in two days, so rested early in the week. The weather was great - sunny and warm (not hot!) during the day, and an occasional brief thunderstorm in the evening. That went on all week; the showers cooled things off nicely and began all over again the next day! I played golf for a couple of days to get ready for a tournament this weekend. Worked today, and more golf on the weekend. And then on Sunday, it's supposed to rain - giving me an opportunity to wind down!

I'm just about done with all of my gardening, finally. Still have to paint some window boxes before I can fill 'em with plants. I have a number of vegetable seedlings that I'm waiting on to get a little bigger before re-planting. Then I have a few raspberry and blackberry bushes (my mother-in-law picked them up for me) to plant. About another load or two of mulch to finish off the cosmetic look - and done!

So, while I get ready for my tournament in the morning, why not catch up on the news of the week!

Until next time...

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The CCAG Fall 2008 Show Is Coming!

Since the Spring 2008 Show was a smashing success CCAG has decided to hold a second show for 2008!

Buy, sell, trade, play, and see classic video games, computers, peripherals, memorabilia, and more at the Classic Computing and Gaming Show (CCAG) on October 12, 2008 at the American Legion Hall - Clifton Post, 22001 Brookpark Rd, Fairview Park, OH. Vendors, clubs, and collectors will be displaying and selling their retro gaming and retro computing goods, from Pong and Atari to Nintendo, Apple and IBM to Commodore and everything in between with many set up for you to play

with and explore. We have 4000+ square feet of space. Help us fill it all up!

For more information please go to <http://www.ccagshow.com/>

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Overlord: Raising Hell Soon!
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Overlord: Raising Hell Playstation 3 Ship Date and New Video Announced

Codemasters announced Monday that Overlord: Raising Hell will launch for the first time on June 24 in the US for the PlayStation 3 computer entertainment system. Providing the most lovable vicious little critters in gaming - the Minions - Overlord: Raising Hell will be dispensing their unique blend of charm and carnage with a new video available for download at <http://www.codemasters.com/overlordraisinghell>.

In preparation for the unruly horde's arrival in the extra evil edition of Triumph Studios' twisted fantasy blockbuster, *Overlord: Raising Hell* is coming out with a new preview video packed with minion mayhem. The video showcases the troop of terrors in full-flight, mobbed up as they swarm over enemies and pillage everything in sight before downing their own body weight in booze.

Every aspiring tyrant hell-bent on subjugating their chosen population requires an army to carry out their wretched will and do cruel deeds without question. Fortunately, in *Overlord: Raising Hell*, players become commander-in-chief of a fighting, thieving, and pillaging horde of up to 50 crazed minions (with hundreds more waiting in reserve) - a force quite unlike any other.

These slavishly loyal, gremlin-esque critters are predisposed to violence and are often drunk. But no matter what, they are always ready and willing to follow even the most suicidal order, whether it's raiding villages for kicks and giggles or hurling themselves at enemies in the face of kamikaze odds. Controlling the minions is a slick operation, requiring a mere flick of the right analogue stick to send a raucous rabble into battle.

While their intellect may not match their loyalty, the Minions are resourceful little lunatics that are able to arm themselves with axes and

swords from fallen enemies. They'll dress themselves with scavenged armor, even if that means rushing into combat wearing a pumpkin as a helmet or brandishing a zombie arm as a club. Use them tactically and the minions will always be there for you, ready to sacrifice themselves just to save your illustrious Overlord arse.

Prepare for a hellishly good time being bad with Overlord Raising Hell, coming June 24 in the US for the PlayStation 3 system. For the new minion mayhem video, lord it over to <http://www.codemasters.com/overlordraisinghell> and sign up as part of the Overlord's army on Facebook* (or the sheep gets it).

The creation of Dutch developer Triumph Studios, the original Overlord was a best seller in 2007. Now the deliciously despotic Overlord and his horde of raucous minions returns in Overlord Raising Hell, a compendium of tyrannical treats coming June 20th for the PlayStation 3 computer entertainment system. The playable demo is now available for download from PlayStation Network.

- * Command Minions, Conquer Kingdoms: Set in a seriously twisted fantasy world, Overlord: Raising Hell is an action adventure that has players being ruthless, determined, and even a little despotic as they pillage lands and conquer kingdoms in order to be proclaimed the all-powerful Overlord. At the heart of the game is an army of slavish little creatures known as Minions, and their presence provides Overlord: Raising Hell with its deliciously dark comedic touches.
- * Go Deeper Into The Warped World: Overlord: Raising Hell adds a series of additional hellish levels, each a supernatural abyss for the game's five kingdoms. With the undead denizens of each abyss on the attack and threatening the Overlord's superiority, there's only one thing for it: assemble the Minions, descend into each abyss and embark on a fresh wave of tyranny in order to claim the underworld throne.
- * Enhanced for PlayStation 3 System: In addition to offering a complete collection of Overlord content, including online co-operative pillaging and head-to-head slaughter, the PlayStation 3 system edition will also be enhanced with detailed visuals, a top-spec audio system with 7.1 surround sound and gameplay refinements, such as the addition of an on-screen mini-map.

EA Hypes Spore with Teaser 'Creature Creator'

Electronic Arts is daring gamers to test the limits of their imagination with the latest game debut from its Maxis studio.

On Tuesday, EA released Spore Creature Creator. Noteworthy is the fact that Spore Creature Creator is not a full game in itself, but rather an introduction to the highly anticipated video game called Spore that will ship globally in September.

Spore comes from the creators of The Sims. The game will give players their own personal universe in a box. Players, in essence, enter a virtual world where they can create and evolve life, establish tribes, build civilizations, sculpt entire worlds, and explore a universe filled with creations made by other gamers. Spore gives players creative tools to customize nearly every aspect of their universe: creatures, vehicles,

buildings and even UFOs.

"Today is the day we begin to see Spore come to life," said Lucy Bradshaw, executive producer and general manager at Maxis. "We're excited to see what players will do with the powerful and intuitive creativity tools we've put into the Spore Creature Creator."

Spore Creature Creator is available now for both PC and Mac. This is a stand-alone product that EA is calling a "creativity toy box" that lets players create their own unique creatures, bring them to life with animations, and share them online with friends around the world.

The Spore Creature Creator lets players take their creatures on a test drive, snap pictures, and make movies of them. Clicking one button lets players share pictures or videos with friends. Players can also share their creations with others by uploading to the "Sporepedia" at the game's Web site. The Sporepedia is an online destination where people worldwide can search for and share Spore creations, comment on other players' designs, and check out celebrity creature creations.

"Our team will be excitedly keeping an eye on the Sporepedia to check out creations made by players from around the world," Bradshaw said.

The ability to upload players' creations to YouTube has also been integrated into the Spore Creature Creator. Players can import and upload videos of their creatures' moves directly to YouTube from within the game. EA said Spore will have its own YouTube channel where all videos of users' creations uploaded from the game will be showcased for the YouTube community to watch, share, rate and comment on.

Players who love their creature so much they want the entire world to see it can post it to their blog for people to check out, and use it to create an avatar for their favorite social-networking site. Players who want to see their creature come to life in the real world can visit Zazzle.com to upload their creature and turn it into a custom coffee mug, T-shirt, magnet or sticker.

The full version of the Spore Creature Creator is available for \$9.99 at retail stores or through online purchase at www.spore.com. A free trial version of the Spore Creature Creator is also available at the Web site.

The trial version features 25 percent of the creature-making parts from Spore and lets players shape, paint and play with their custom-created creatures. Creatures made in the Spore Creature Creator can also be imported into the full Spore game, allowing players to populate their own galaxies when the game ships worldwide later this year.

The Spore Creature Creator is rated E for Everyone by the ESRB. The downloadable demo version is free. Spore ships for the PC, Mac, Nintendo DS, and mobile phones on Sept. 5 in Europe and Sept. 7 in North America and Asia.

EA Extends Bid for Take-Two, Is Rejected Again

Video game publisher Electronic Arts Inc on Tuesday again extended its \$2 billion takeover offer Take-Two Interactive Software Inc. but the smaller rival rejected anew the bid as too low.

EA, publisher of blockbuster games such as "Madden" and "Need For Speed," said it extended the \$25.74-a-share offer to July 18 from June 16 in order to allow time for the U.S. Federal Trade Commission - which must approve the pact - to review the deal.

Take-Two, publisher of titles including "Grand Theft Auto" and "Major League Baseball 2K," said its board continues to recommend that shareholders not tender their shares to EA, which launched its bid in February.

So far, about 6.14 million shares of Take-Two have been tendered in the offer, which Take-Two said represents just 7.9 percent of the total.

Take-Two Chairman Strauss Zelnick said in a statement, "The latest extension of EA's unsolicited, highly conditional tender offer does not alter the fact that their proposal still significantly undervalues Take-Two, a fact that is reflected in the overwhelming number of stockholders who still have not tendered their shares."

Electronics Arts had originally hoped that the deal would be done before the late April launch of "Grant Theft Auto IV," whose sales topped \$500 million in its first week.

But Signal Hill Group analyst Todd Greenwald said that if EA succeeds in buying Take-Two, there is still time to reap the financial benefits of the popular video game.

"The key thing for EA is to get it done before the holidays," he said. "Yes, GTA launched on April 29, but the game ... is definitely going to get another big bump come October and November. EA wants to be in place (then) so they get that bump, as opposed to Take-Two."

Should the FTC approve the deal, EA may have to sweeten its bid to north of \$30 in order to change the minds of Take-Two management and shareholders, Greenwald adds.

In the meantime, Take-Two said it continues to mull its strategic alternatives.

A purchase would also hand Electronic Arts, which battles with Activision Inc (ATVI.O) for the title of biggest video game maker, a virtual monopoly in sports games. EA makes the popular "Madden" franchise and Take-Two makes some of the only titles capable of rivaling EA's powerful football, hockey and basketball franchises.

Take-Two shares slipped 8 cents to \$26.32 on Nasdaq on Tuesday afternoon. Shares of EA, which would become the largest sports game maker by far if it buys Take-Two, rose 4 cents to \$47.10, also on Nasdaq.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!
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Chandler Hosts Vintage Video Game Challenge Saturday

Remember when Atari was king? Adults can relive the video games of their youth during the Vintage Video Game Challenge. Gamers age 18 and older will play classic titles - such as Asteroids, Centipede, Lunar Lander, Missile Command and Battlezone - on an Atari Flashback 2 game system. After a preliminary round, the top three scorers will face off for prizes. Individuals will play on a first-come, first-served basis. While you wait, check out ZAP! The exhibit explores the video game craze of the 1970s and 80s with arcade games, memorabilia and photos.

>> The Vintage Video Game Challenge for adults is 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, June 21, at McCullough-Price House, 300 S. Chandler Village Drive, Chandler, AZ. A similar competition for teens ages 13-17 is 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Friday, June 20. Free. (480) 782-2876 or www.chandleraz.gov/pricehouse.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Judge to Plaintiffs in Yahoo Lawsuit: Don't Rush Me

A judge denied shareholders' request to accelerate the start of a trial for the lawsuit they filed alleging Yahoo failed to protect their interests by sabotaging Microsoft's acquisition attempt.

The shareholders failed to prove that the court should expedite the setting of a trial date, Judge William Chandler of Delaware's Chancery Court ruled Monday.

"Aside from the maelstrom of media coverage, very little has changed about plaintiffs' core contentions since I denied plaintiff's previous request for expedition," Chandler wrote, pointing out that the plaintiffs had previously filed a similarly unsuccessful motion to expedite this matter.

Last week, the shareholders in the class-action lawsuit argued in their motion that it was imperative for the trial to be held in July, before Yahoo holds its annual shareholders meeting on Aug. 1.

In particular, the plaintiffs wanted the judge to rule on the legality of a controversial employee severance plan that they allege Yahoo leaders adopted to derail Microsoft's attempt to buy the company.

The employee severance plan is so vague and costly that it amounts to a poison pill "entrenchment device" that is illegal under Delaware law, the plaintiffs argue.

The plan, which was approved shortly after Microsoft's offer, would be triggered by a change in who controls the company, including the election of a new slate of directors, as billionaire investor Carl Icahn seeks.

Thus, the plaintiffs argue that, as long as the severance plan is in place, shareholders will be coerced to vote to reelect the current board, just to prevent the plan from getting activated and triggering a mass employee exodus.

The plaintiffs also argued in another filing last week that Yahoo's deal to outsource part of its search advertising business to Google represents a coercion on shareholders' vote because it gives Google the option to cancel the deal if Icahn succeeds in getting his candidates elected to the board.

But Judge Chandler wasn't convinced that the plaintiffs' case is at risk of irreparable damage unless a trial is rushed and scheduled for next month. He reminded the plaintiffs that in order to expedite the setting of a trial date, the court must accelerate certain proceedings and conduct, among other things, "a truncated determination of the merits of the underlying claims."

"To successfully earn expedition, the movant must show good cause why it is necessary to impose upon the counterparty and the Court these substantially increased burdens of time, effort, and expense," Chandler wrote.

Instead, the plaintiffs and Yahoo should quickly set up a briefing schedule regarding Yahoo's motion to dismiss the lawsuit, Chandler wrote, adding that the court is "willing to and capable of deciding that motion before the Yahoo annual shareholders' meeting."

The lead plaintiffs in the class-action lawsuit are Detroit's Police & Fire Retirement System and General Retirement System.

For Yahoo, the judge's determination is a welcome victory in the case. Two weeks ago, the judge ruled against Yahoo's request to keep portions of the plaintiffs' complaint under seal. As a result, the document was released in its entirety and its previously redacted parts provided details about Yahoo's internal process for drafting the severance plan

Containing excerpts from internal Yahoo documents, e-mail and phone-call transcripts, the complaint fanned the flames of discontent among those Yahoo shareholders who are upset that the merger talks with Microsoft collapsed.

In their complaint, filed originally in February and later amended, the plaintiffs claim that the severance plan is unusually broad and generous and could have cost Microsoft up to US\$2.4 billion in severance payments and benefits, not to mention the cost associated with losing many valuable employees.

However, Yahoo claims that the plan doesn't make it easy for employees to qualify for its benefits because it has a so-called "double trigger" - a change in control and an employee's termination "without cause" or a resignation for "good reason."

Microsoft announced its unsolicited offer to buy Yahoo on Feb. 1 - a \$44.6 billion cash-and-stock deal that offered shareholders a 62 percent

premium over Yahoo's stock price the day before.

Yahoo's board rejected that offer, saying it undervalued the company, and Microsoft later increased it to \$47.5 billion, but Microsoft eventually walked away from the negotiations on May 3 after the two sides failed to agree on a price.

After Microsoft withdrew its offer, several large Yahoo institutional investors publicly criticized Yahoo CEO Jerry Yang and the board for, in their view, not negotiating in good faith and failing to look out for shareholders' best interests.

Yang and other Yahoo executives responded by saying that they were open to negotiating further but that Microsoft unexpectedly walked away without ever putting its last offer in writing.

Microsoft has said it is no longer interested in acquiring all of Yahoo, and its subsequent attempts to buy Yahoo's search ad business also failed.

Icahn's main motivation in seeking to oust the current directors, as well as unseating Yang as CEO, is to bring Microsoft back to the negotiating table.

On Tuesday, The Wall Street Journal reported that Icahn is now mulling whether to proceed with his proxy fight to oust the entire incumbent board or instead aim for "some" seats. The Journal, which sourced its information to anonymous people familiar with the matter, also reported that Icahn is still evaluating the merits of the search ad deal between Yahoo and Google.

Yahoo has said the deal will generate \$250 million to \$450 million in operating cash flow during the first 12 months, and that it represents an annual revenue opportunity for Yahoo of \$800 million. The deal is for an initial period of four years, with an option for Yahoo to extend it for a further six years.

Firefox 3 Web Browser Is Now Out As Free Download

The new version of the Firefox Web browser became available as a free download Tuesday.

The release was delayed as visitors checking for the update overloaded Firefox's Web servers. The site was slow or unreachable for about two hours starting about 12:45 p.m. Eastern time, 15 minutes before the scheduled release time, according to AlertSite, an Internet performance monitoring company. Performance improved later in the day.

Firefox supporters organized launch parties around the world as they tried to set a world record for most software downloads in a 24-hour period.

The category is new, and Guinness World Records must certify it, a process that could take a week or longer.

Firefox comes from Mozilla, an open-source community in which thousands of people, mostly volunteers, collectively develop free products.

Firefox is the No. 2 Web browser behind Microsoft Corp.'s Internet Explorer.

Firefox 3 includes enhancements to help users organize their frequently visited Web sites and block access to sites known to distribute viruses and other malicious software.

Users of Yahoo Inc.'s mail service can also use Firefox 3 to send e-mail by clicking a "mailto" link they might come across clicking on a name or a "contact us" link on a Web page. Previously such links could only open a standalone, desktop e-mail program.

Firefox 3 also offers other design and speed improvements.

Toshiba Lays Claim to 'World's Lightest' Laptop

Toshiba on Tuesday launched a new ultraportable laptop that it claims is the world's lightest, putting it in contention with vendors including Apple and Lenovo.

The company said the full-featured PortR500-S5007V weighs just 2.4 pounds (1.08 kilograms), compared to Apple's MacBook Air, which weighs 3 pounds, and Lenovo's Thinkpad X300, which weighs around 2.93 pounds. The laptop measures 0.77 inches at its thinnest point, according to Toshiba.

The company also claimed that the new laptop was the first to include a 128G-byte solid-state drive (SSD) to replace the hard drive. Laptops to date have had 64G bytes of storage, though both Lenovo and Apple provide 128G bytes of storage through two 64G-byte modules.

SSD has no moving parts like a hard drive, so it consumes less power that can give the battery more runtime. The laptop can run for an eight-hour runtime on a single battery charge, according to Toshiba. The company did not respond immediately to questions about the type of battery in the laptop.

Battery life is also preserved by the laptop's transreflective 12.1-inch screen, which can shut down the LED (light-emitting diode) backlighting by reflecting the sun's rays to illuminate the screen, according to Toshiba.

For US\$2,999, users can get a laptop powered by an Intel Core 2 Duo U7700 processor at 1.33GHz, with 2M bytes of cache and 2G bytes of RAM. It will come with Windows Vista Business OS, which is also downgradable to Windows XP Professional. The laptop includes a SuperMulti optical drive that can read and rewrite DVD and CD media, wired and wireless 802.11 a/g/n networking, Bluetooth 2.0 support and built-in safety features to protect laptop data during falls.

Toshiba said the laptop includes a specially built motherboard that can provide the same functionality of boards found in 15.4-inch laptops, but is one-third the size.

The laptop will start shipping in the third quarter this year, according to the company. The company wasn't available to comment on worldwide availability.

Free Internet Is Part of New FCC Airwaves Auction

The Federal Communications Commission on Friday said it wants to auction a section of wireless airwaves to buyers willing to provide free broadband Internet service without pornography.

The agency asked for public comment on its plan to auction an unused portion of the wireless spectrum with the condition that the winning bidder offer free Internet access and filter out obscene content on part of those airwaves.

Successful bidders for the spectrum would also be required to provide coverage to at least half of the United States within four years, and to at least 95 percent of the U.S. population by the end of the 10-year license, the FCC said.

"Additional obligations associated with the licensee's free broadband service would include a requirement to provide a network-based filtering mechanism for the free Internet service in order to protect children and families, and a requirement that the network allow for the use of open devices," the agency said.

The FCC posted its proposal on its website at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/FCC-08-158A1.doc.

Verizon Expects NY Green Light for FiOS Next Month

Verizon Communications Inc said on Wednesday it expects the New York Public Service Commission to approve its FiOS video service next month.

"Our plan is to cover all of the 3.1 million households in all five boroughs in the next five to six years. We will start this year as soon as we receive the approval of the New York Public Service Commission, which we expect will be next month," Chief Operating Officer Denny Strigl said in a speech at the NCTA telecommunications industry conference in Las Vegas.

In New York City, which includes the five boroughs, FiOS TV would compete with Time Warner Cable Inc and Cablevision Systems Corp.

DontLikeUrName? U Can Get a New Yahoo Address

Yahoo on Thursday announced two new e-mail domains for Yahoo Mail users worldwide. The domains are ymail.com and rocketmail.com.

The search-engine provider is billing the new domains as a way to give users a chance to register for the e-mail address or Yahoo ID they really want. For some, that could mean abandoning early selections, such as CutiePie4Ever80@yahoo.com or mattclark1977@yahoo.com for a new image.

"We recognize that people want an e-mail address that reflects who they are, whether they are signing up for an e-mail address for the first time, or simply updating their e-mail pseudonym to reflect the stage they are at in life," said John Kremer, vice president of Yahoo Mail.

Despite the rise of Google's Gmail, Yahoo Mail is still the number-one Webmail service in the world with more than 260 million users, according to comScore Media Metrix.

Because it has so many users, the most desirable e-mail addresses have been taken for the yahoo.com domain, as well as for localized versions in countries around the world. With the new domain choices, Yahoo will make millions of new e-mail addresses available.

Yahoo may also be trying to put some juice into its brand, according to Greg Sterling, principal analyst at Sterling Market Intelligence.

"Some people may perceive, in some sense, that the Yahoo brand is not be as edgy or cool as it once was," Sterling said. "The Yahoo brand is still very across the board, but groups of people may not think it's quite as buzzworthy."

Yahoo recently commissioned a survey conducted by Harris Interactive to determine what online adults look for when choosing an e-mail address. The study found that the majority of online adults (59 percent) consider the most important attribute of an e-mail address to be that it is easy to remember.

Asked if they would choose any e-mail address for personal use, seven in 10 online adults said they would opt to have some portion of their name included. Specifically, 31 percent would want their last name included, 27 percent would choose their first name, and 28 percent would prefer to have their nickname as part of their e-mail address.

Of online adults who indicated they are not currently using their first choice e-mail address, more than half (54 percent) agreed that they want their e-mail address to reflect who they are, and about half (48 percent) would be at least somewhat likely to change addresses should their preferred choice become available.

E-mail addresses at the new domains will have the same Yahoo Mail features as addresses at the yahoo.com domain, including free unlimited storage, integrated instant messaging and text messaging, protection from spam and viruses and country-specific e-mail accounts.

A Yahoo ID will work for everything across the Yahoo Network, from checking e-mail to checking out Messenger, Flickr, Groups, Sports, Finance and more. In many markets, Yahoo said, the company will also help users transfer their e-mail and contacts to their new address and notify friends of their new e-mail address.

"I think people are more inclined to use a Web-based e-mail address if they have a name or some address that they like, one that's more intuitive," Sterling said. "Yahoo should see a lot of registrations. Whether or not they'll see a lot of usage is another matter. It's sort of like domain names. You want to reserve your name."

eBay has unveiled expanded protections for those buyers and sellers in its marketplace who complete transactions using the company's PayPal online payment service.

The new protections, which will go into effect in the fourth quarter and are offered at no extra cost, will cover almost all types of PayPal transactions, except those involving autos, real estate and capital equipment, such as heavy machinery.

eBay made the announcement at its eBay Live conference for merchants, which began Thursday and ends Saturday in Chicago.

To be covered, transactions have to occur on eBay.com, and not on the company's country-specific marketplace sites. Buyers can be anywhere in the world, but sellers must be geographically based in the U.S.

Buyers will be covered for 100 percent of an item's purchase price, with no limit on the price, which previously was capped at a maximum of US\$2,000. For sellers, the PayPal protection has been available to PowerSellers, which must meet certain requirements to qualify, but is now being extended to all merchants, and it also has no price maximum.

eBay will refund the money in the form of cash-back to buyers' and sellers' PayPal accounts. Auctions, fixed-price products and store items are all covered by the protections.

Buyers would be protected for items that either aren't received or that are significantly different from the description provided by sellers.

Meanwhile, merchants would be protected against claims, chargebacks and reversals due to an unauthorized payment or an item that was not received. The protections extend to items shipped by sellers to the 190 markets worldwide where PayPal is accepted.

In addition, eBay is increasing its incentives for PowerSellers, offering a 20 percent discount from their final transaction fees if they have at least a 4.9 rating in the four "detailed seller rating" (DSR) categories. eBay already offered PowerSellers smaller discounts based on DSR ratings.

Thursday's announcement clearly seeks to address one of the biggest deterrents to doing business on eBay: the fear of fraud.

Historically, eBay has defined itself as a neutral, mostly hands-off marketplace where third parties meet to buy and sell products. In other words, eBay enables transactions between buyers and sellers and doesn't get as involved in the actual deals as more traditional e-tailers. For example, Amazon.com, in addition to selling its own inventory, also has an eBay-like marketplace, but exerts more control over its activities than eBay does.

It is one of eBay's core beliefs that people are overwhelmingly honest and that its large community of buyers and sellers can police itself by publicly rating its members via the marketplace's feedback system.

However, as eBay has sought to grow by attracting more mainstream and less adventuresome buyers and sellers, it has progressively become more involved in intervening whenever transactions go sour due to alleged

fraud or miscommunication between the parties.

Recently, eBay officials have made it a priority to boost the buying experience on its marketplace. Earlier this year, eBay announced sweeping changes aimed at rewarding those sellers who provide good customer service and charge reasonable shipping fees, betting that this will in turn attract more buyers to the marketplace.

As often happens whenever eBay announces changes, controversy erupted, as sellers complained about the modifications they didn't like, such as a rebalancing of seller fees and the cancellation of sellers' ability to leave negative feedback for buyers.

US FTC Halts Domain Name Registration Scam

A U.S. judge has ordered a Canadian company to stop billing small businesses and other customers for nonexistent domain name registration services, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission said Tuesday.

The Toronto-based Data Business Solutions, doing business as Internet Listing Service, deceptively posed as domain name registrars and sent bogus bills to thousands of U.S. small businesses and nonprofit groups, the FTC alleged. The invoices were for annual "Website address listing" as well as search engine listing.

Many of the businesses and nonprofits believed they would lose their Web site addresses unless they paid the invoice, the FTC said in a press release.

The invoices sent by the company listed the existing domain name of the billed party's Web site or a slight variation on the domain name, such as substituting.org for.com, the FTC said.

Most consumers who received the invoices were led to believe that the defendants were their domain name registrar and that they must pay them to maintain their registrations of domain names. Other customers were induced to pay based on the defendants' claims that their "search optimization" service would "direct mass traffic" to the customers' sites and that their "proven search engine listing service" will result in "a substantial increase in traffic," the FTC said.

Internet Listing Service has been sending the invoices out since 2004, the FTC said. Customers who paid the invoices did not receive any domain name registration services, and the search optimization service was ineffective and did not increase traffic to the customers' Web sites, the FTC said in a complaint, filed in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division, in May.

The invoices suggested that the defendants had a preexisting business relationship with the customers, the FTC alleged.

Judge Robert Dow Jr. has ordered a halt to the company's claims and frozen the defendants' assets in the U.S., pending trial. The FTC will seek a permanent halt to the scheme and will ask the court to order the company to pay back victimized consumers, the agency said.

The defendants named in the FTC complaint are Data Business Solutions,

also doing business as Internet Listing Service, ILS, Ilscorp.net, Domain Listing Service, DLS and Dlscorp.net. Also named were the company's owners, Ari Balabanian, Isaac Benlolo and Kirk Mulveney.

Internet Domain Name for China Surpasses ".net"

Registrations for Internet addresses ending in China's ".cn" have surpassed those for the global ".net," showing the continued rapid rise in Internet use in the communist nation.

A study by VeriSign Inc., which runs the ".net" databases and other core directories for helping computers find Web sites and route e-mail, found that ".cn" overtook ".net" sometime in the first quarter of 2008.

VeriSign did not provide registration breakdowns but said ".cn" registrations grew 23 percent from the previous quarter and were triple those in the same period in 2007.

The organization that runs Germany's ".de" domain pegged ".cn" registrations at 11.8 million and ".net" at 11.6 million as of May.

The findings come as China reported that the number of Internet users there has soared to 221 million, by some measures tying the U.S. online population as largest in the world.

There's no threat of ".cn" overtaking ".com" any time soon, however. The ".com" suffix, which VeriSign also runs, is the overwhelming leader, with 76.5 million registrations worldwide, while ".de" is second with 12.1 million, according to the German group.

Both ".com" and ".net" are global domain names, available to individuals, groups and companies worldwide on a first-come, first-served basis. They are typically used by U.S. entities, however. Elsewhere, country-specific addresses such as ".de" and ".cn" are typically preferred.

Many country-specific domains have in recent years relaxed registration rules and are now available around the world and function like ".com" and ".net."

VeriSign's study found growth in other country names as well, including Poland's ".pl," Spain's ".es," Russia's ".ru" and France's ".fr."

Study Shatters Myths on Personal Net Use at Work

It's no secret that people sneak in some personal e-mail and Web surfing when they're supposed to be working.

A new study attempts to shatter perceptions that these Web surfers are just slackers trying to avoid work. In fact, it turns out everyone does it, from senior managers to entry-level employees - and researchers figure that means management attempts to clamp down on Internet use may be missing the mark.

Many legitimate reasons may be at play, speculates R. Kelly Garrett, one of the study's authors and a communications professor at Ohio State University. For instance, people may use the Web at work to help balance job and life responsibilities; with the personal matters taken care of from work, they can focus on the task at hand.

"It's appropriate to just avoid the knee-jerk response that all personal Internet use is detrimental," Garrett said.

Installing filters to block access to Web sites and e-mail services could backfire by reducing job satisfaction and thus productivity, researchers wrote.

The study on "cyberslacking," based on statistical analyses of responses in a phone survey of 1,024 people during the summer of 2006, was published in the June issue of the CyberPsychology and Behavior journal.

James N. Danziger, a professor at the Center for Research on Information Technology and Organizations at the University of California, Irvine, was Garrett's co-author.

The study didn't attempt to go much beyond trying to gauge the types of employees who use the Internet for personal reasons. Garrett said more research is needed to determine motives and measure effects on productivity. Those studies, researchers say, would then help companies figure out how best to control and accommodate personal use.

One in Three IT Staff Snoops on Co-workers

One in three information technology professionals abuses administrative passwords to access confidential data such as colleagues' salary details, personal emails or board-meeting minutes, according to a survey.

U.S. information security company Cyber-Ark surveyed 300 senior IT professionals, and found that one-third admitted to secretly snooping, while 47 percent said they had accessed information that was not relevant to their role.

"All you need is access to the right passwords or privileged accounts and you're privy to everything that's going on within your company," Mark Fullbrook, Cyber-Ark's UK director, said in a statement released along with the survey results on Thursday.

"For most people, administrative passwords are a seemingly innocuous tool used by the IT department to update or amend systems. To those 'in the know' they are the keys to the kingdom," he added.

Cyber-Ark said privileged passwords get changed far less frequently than user passwords, with 30 percent being changed every quarter and 9 percent never changed at all, meaning that IT staff who have left an organization could still gain access.

It added that seven out of 10 companies rely on outdated and insecure methods to exchange sensitive data, with 35 percent choosing email and 35 percent using couriers, while 4 percent still relied on the postal system.

Court Limits Employer Access to Worker Messages

A federal appeals court has made it more difficult for employers to snoop legally on e-mails and text messages their workers send from company accounts.

Under Wednesday's ruling by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, employers that contract an outside business to transmit text messages can't read them unless the worker agrees.

Users of text-messaging services "have a reasonable expectation of privacy" regarding messages stored on the service provider's network, Judge Kim Wardlaw wrote in the three-judge panel's unanimous opinion.

The ruling limits employers' access to employee e-mail on internal servers.

The text-message part of the ruling will affect more employers than the e-mail portion because most U.S. companies pay outside parties for text-messaging but keep e-mail on internal servers, analysts said.

The judges had few precedents, Wardlaw acknowledged in the ruling.

"The extent to which the Fourth Amendment provides protection for the contents of electronic communications in the Internet Age is an open question," she wrote.

A civil liberties advocacy group called the ruling a "tremendous victory" for online privacy. The Electronic Frontier Foundation said in a posting online that the ruling helps ensure the Fourth Amendment "applies to your communications online just as strongly as it does to packages and letters."

The ruling came in a lawsuit filed by Ontario police Sgt. Jeff Quon and three other officers after Arch Wireless gave their department transcripts of Quon's text messages in 2002. Police officials read the messages to determine whether department-issued pagers were being used solely for work purposes.

"I think right now service providers are going to be a little leery of providing anything to the subscriber because of this case," said John Horowitz, a lawyer representing Arch Wireless.

Dimitrios Rinos, an attorney for the city of Ontario and its police department, said his clients probably will appeal the ruling.

Voters Take Advantage of Internet To Get Unfiltered Data

Nearly half of all Americans have used the Internet, e-mail or cell-phone text messaging to get news about the 2008 presidential campaign, share their views, and mobilize others, according to the Pew Internet and American Life Project.

The proportion of Americans going online to get political news or

information on a typical day at the tail end of the primary season has more than doubled since a comparable point in the 2004 race -- from eight percent of all adults in spring 2004 to 17 percent in spring 2008.

"The Internet is allowing people to learn and share their interest in the political realm in a way that wasn't available 10 years ago or 20 years ago," said Pew Internet project research specialist Aaron Smith, an author of the report.

The poll found, among other things, that younger voters are among the most active and intense Internet users. Young voters are helping define the online political debate - 12 percent of online 18-to-29-year-olds have posted their own political commentary or writing to an online newsgroup, Web site, or blog. Led by young voters, Democrats and Obama supporters have taken the lead in their use of online tools.

These online voters are more likely to support Democrat Barack Obama, Pew revealed, and that means his partisans were significantly ahead of Hillary Clinton's supporters online in the Democratic race. What's more, the survey showed, Obama backers have a higher profile in some online areas than supporters of Republican John McCain.

Three online activities became especially prominent as the presidential primary campaigns progressed: First, 35 percent of Americans say they have watched online political videos -- a figure that nearly triples the reading the Pew project got in the 2004 race.

Second, 10 percent say they have used social-networking sites such as Facebook or MySpace to gather information or become involved. This is particularly popular with younger voters: Two-thirds of Internet users under the age of 30 have a social-networking profile, and half of these use social-networking sites to get or share information about politics or the campaigns.

Third, six percent of Americans have made political contributions online, compared with two percent during the entire 2004 campaign.

A significant number of voters are also using the Internet to gain access to campaign events and primary documents. Some 39 percent of online Americans have used the Internet to access "unfiltered" campaign materials, which include videos of candidate debates, speeches and announcements, as well as position papers and speech transcripts.

"The number of people who are bypassing the traditional media and, in a lot of cases, bypassing the campaigns themselves to go online and get documents that are unspinned and unfiltered, such as ... speech texts and candidate debates, is noteworthy," Smith said. "People are watching or reading those at their own leisure and absent any kind of analysis from traditional news sources."

Online activism using social media has also grown substantially since the first time Pew probed this issue during the 2006 midterm elections. Pew found, for example, that 11 percent of Americans have forwarded or posted someone else's commentary about the race. Five percent have posted their own original commentary or analysis, and six percent have gone online to donate money to a candidate or campaign.

Yet despite the growth in the number of people who are politically engaged online, Internet users express some ambivalence about the role of the Internet in the campaign. On one hand, 28 percent of wired

Americans say the Internet makes them feel more personally connected to the campaign, and 22 percent say they would not be as involved in the campaign if not for the Internet. At the same time, however, even larger numbers feel that the Internet magnifies the most extreme viewpoints and is a source of misinformation for many voters.

FDA Cautions Consumers Against Cancer "Cures"

Consumers should beware of products sold on the Internet that claim to cure cancer, U.S. health officials said on Tuesday, threatening penalties against more than two dozen companies selling creams, tea and pills as treatments for the disease.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration said a variety of Web sites sell such products, which can harm patients with potentially risky ingredients or by keeping them from seeking proven therapies.

"FDA is very concerned consumers will purchase these products on the Internet and use them instead of products that have been proven safe and effective," said Michael Levy, head of the FDA's Division of New Drugs and Labeling Compliance.

Levy and other agency officials said their warning letters targeted roughly 125 products that claim to treat, cure or prevent cancer. The FDA has not received any reports from consumers who have fallen ill taking them, officials said, but called on the companies to stop making promises.

They could not say how many such products have been sold. Some included various ingredients such as bloodroot, shark cartilage, coral calcium and various mushrooms, according to the agency.

Representatives for the American Herbal Products Association said such ingredients are not harmful but that manufacturers of products that include them are not allowed by law to make medical claims.

"These companies are making drug claims and it is simply illegal to market an unapproved new drug," said Michael McGuffin, president of the association which represents a variety of herbal product makers.

Cancer is a condition that comes in many forms and causes cells to grow out of control. Approved treatments include such methods as surgery, radiation, chemotherapy and other medications.

"FDA expects prompt and complete corrective action," said David Elder, director of the FDA's Office of Enforcement. "Firms that don't heed the warnings that we've delivered and other firms marketing similar unapproved products may face further regulatory action."

The agency can levy fines, impose injunctions and seize products, among other penalties.

FDA officials conceded that the Internet makes it easy for companies to shut down one site and start up another. They also said it can be difficult to track down who actually operates a website, which can be registered in one country but run in another.

The agency listed the companies targeted by the letters on its website at: <http://www.fda.gov/cder/news/fakecancercures.htm>.

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